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Substantive questions

Guidelines for the functioning of United Nations information centres integrated with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In resolution 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, the General Assembly noted that the Department of Public Information intended to draft, jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a set of guidelines indicating the operational framework for the integrated United Nations information centres. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the guidelines before their implementation to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session in May 2000. The proposed guidelines represent one of several steps taken to ensure that the integrated information centres fulfil the purpose for which they were established.[1]

2. In 1992, 18 information centres, of which three are currently not operational, were integrated with the field offices of UNDP. In 1993 and 1994, the Department of Public Information sought to obtain the views on the integration exercise from the Governments hosting such centres and also circulated a questionnaire in that regard among the Directors of the integrated centres. After an evaluation of the responses received, the Secretary-General observed that one area requiring further efforts was that of adequate and regular briefings for Resident Representatives of UNDP serving concurrently as full-time information centre Directors.[1] He also pointed out that integration must respect the prevailing rules and regulations of the Secretariat pertaining to budgetary, personnel and other administrative matters. The Secretary-General concluded that he intended to continue the integration experience, whenever feasible, in accordance with his stated objectives: to present a unified image of the United Nations in the field; to enhance information activities in all areas, including development issues; and to achieve possible economies through sharing of common services.

3. Integration has been discussed during several sessions of the Committee on Information, and the Secretary-General has issued four reports on the issue.[2] The General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to continue the integration exercise in a cost-effective manner and, whenever feasible, on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host Government. The General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the information functions and the autonomy of United Nations information centres were not adversely affected by the integration exercise.[3]

4. Cooperation between the field offices of UNDP and the Department of Public Information has a long

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history. An effort to formalize this relationship was made in 1990 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding on field representation, which remains the foundation for this cooperation. However, to take into account the developments in the field over the past decade and the requests made by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General proposes the following guidelines for the operation of the integrated United Nations information centres, which have been jointly elaborated by the Department and UNDP.

II. Guidelines indicating the operational framework for the integrated centres

A. Basic principles

5. Within the guidelines indicating the operational framework for the integrated centres:

(a) There should be a coordinated approach to information at the country level in order to create a positive, accurate and balanced understanding of the aims and activities of the United Nations and project a unified image of the Organization;

(b) A United Nations information centre should provide leadership in the implementation of public information activities in the field and cooperate with all partners from the United Nations system in this regard, particularly UNDP. The Resident Representative will keep the information centre informed of the projects and activities of UNDP, as well as of other organizations of the United Nations system at the country level. The centre will promote media coverage of these activities along with its overall coverage of the United Nations system;

(c) Local resources should be used in a cost-effective manner by sharing premises, wherever feasible, by establishing common services and by pooling facilities, such as meeting rooms, telecommunications and reference libraries;

(d) Integration of United Nations information centres with the field offices of UNDP is intended as an effective and efficient cooperation between UNDP and the Department of Public Information. Although under the leadership of the Resident Representative, the information centre functions as an autonomous branch of the Department of Public Information. Its activities and resources are devoted to information functions on behalf of the United Nations as a whole, subject to the rules and regulations of the Secretariat pertaining to budgetary, personnel and other administrative matters.

B. The role of the United Nations information centres

6. The role of the United Nations information centres includes the following:

(a) United Nations information centres, as branch offices of the Department of Public Information in the field, are entrusted with the same mandate as the Department, as outlined in resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993;

(b) The information centres mobilize public opinion in their areas of operation, with a view to promoting an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations; in this respect they work closely with national Government offices, media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and civil society in general;

(c) The information centres promote United Nations "success stories" in the field by providing information-related services and advice to the local offices of the organizations of the United Nations system;

(d) With the assistance of, and in cooperation with, local partners from the United Nations system, the information centres should take the lead in developing information tools, such as joint newsletters, web sites and common reference libraries, and should also facilitate access to information resources available at Headquarters.

C. The role of the Resident Representative

7. The role of the Resident Representative involves:

(a) In his/her capacity as Director of a United Nations information centre, the Resident Representative reports to the Department of Public Information on all aspects of the work programme, administration, budget and personnel matters pertaining to the information centre;

(b) As centre Director, the Resident Representative, in close consultation with the centre's National Information Officer, develops the annual programme of information activities and ensures, by establishing the appropriate framework, that all organizations of the United Nations system represented in the country adopt a unified and coordinated approach to information-related matters;

(c) As centre Director, he/she furthermore ensures that the resources of the centre are used in a balanced proportion to promote the mandates established by the General Assembly, to support the information activities of the United Nations system and to comply with instructions received from the Department of Public Information;

(d) As centre Director, the Resident Representative is responsible for all official contacts with Government offices;

(e) As centre Director, the Resident Representative ensures that the centre's National Information Officer participates regularly in the planning of the information activities by the organizations of the United Nations system, their anticipated events and visits of their high-level officials;

(f) In consultation with the centre's National Information Officer, the Resident Representative will participate in press conferences, make statements and give briefings on the global themes of the United Nations;

(g) The Resident Representative will keep the Department of Public Information informed of any planned absence from his/her duty station, providing in advance the name and contact details of the Acting Resident Representative;

(h) The Resident Representative will provide administrative services to the information centre by approving and/or certifying obligations from the centre's accounts upon authorization from the Department of Public Information.

D. The role of the centre's National Information Officer

8. The role of the National Information Officer is described as follows:

(a) The National Information Officer works under the supervision of the Resident Representative who, as centre Director, is his/her first reporting officer. During the absence of the centre Director, the National Information Officer is normally Officer-in-charge of the centre;

(b) The National Information Officer in an integrated information centre is responsible for the daily operations of the centre and the supervision of its staff. With regard to information related issues, he/she is the focal point for the local public information activities by the organizations of the United Nations system and keeps the Resident Representative duly informed. He/she coordinates these activities, participates in system-wide meetings, calls meetings with information focal points of the funds, programmes and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, organizes briefings for the press and non-governmental organizations, handles media arrangements for visiting senior officials, selects and transmits to Headquarters information on media reports and other issues of interest to the Secretary-General;

(c) The National Information Officer is responsible for working-level contacts with Government offices and for contacts at all levels with media, non-governmental organizations and educational and professional institutions.

E. The role of the Department of Public Information

9. The role of the Department of Public Information is as follows:

(a) The Department will arrange briefing sessions for a Resident Representative who will be serving concurrently as information centre Director, both prior to his/her taking up a new assignment and in connection with subsequent visits to Headquarters;

(b) The Department will invite centre directors to attend appropriate regional meetings/briefings, irrespective of whether they are UNDP Resident Representatives or staff members of the Department;

(c) Based on its regular monitoring of programme activity performance, the Department will provide special guidance and support to integrated centres where required;

(d) Special efforts will be made to enhance the skills of the National Information Officer and other staff of the information centre, particularly in the form of training opportunities.

F. The role of the United Nations Development Programme

10. The role of UNDP includes:

(a) UNDP and the Department of Public Information at Headquarters will share the responsibility for the preparation of performance evaluations of Resident Representatives with regard to the discharge of United Nations public information responsibilities;

(b) UNDP will invite local staff of the information centre, in particular the centre's National Information Officer, to attend meetings relevant to public information work at the field level.

G. Correspondence procedures

11. Correspondence procedures include:

(a) On major issues, the centre Director communicates directly with the Department of Public Information at Headquarters and copies such correspondence to the National Information Officer. In reciprocal fashion, the National Information Officer may communicate directly with the Department at Headquarters, copying correspondence to the Director;

(b) On daily operations, the Department of Public Information at Headquarters communicates directly with staff members of the centre, with copies to the Director. Staff members of the centre may communicate directly with the Department at Headquarters, copying the Director as necessary.

III. Conclusion

12. At Headquarters, UNDP and the Department have established a working group whose objective is to ensure that the information centres fulfil their mandate and that information activities at the country level are carried out in accordance with the Secretary-General's instructions and in full respect for relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

Notes

[1] See also A/AC.198/2000/3.

[2] See A/AC.198/1993/7; A/AC.198/1994/5; A/AC.198/1997/5; and A/AC.198/1999/3.

[3] Resolution 49/38 B of 9 December 1994; 51/138 B of 13 December 1996; 52/220 of 22 December 1997; and 53/59 B of 3 December 1998.